

Victorian College of the Arts  
**Media Release 2008**  
Friday 26 September

**VCA Drama – Company 2008**  
in collaboration with VCA Production presents

***The Masque of the Red Death***  
by Edgar Allan Poe ~ directed by John Bolton  
Wednesday 29 October to Friday 7 November

Premiere

**The horror- the horror**

VCA Drama in collaboration with VCA Production presents the premiere of an original adaptation of the short story *The Masque of the Red Death*, Edgar Allan Poe's 1842 horror masterpiece.

Created by the talented Company 2008 under the expert guidance of John Bolton, this is an invigorating, scandalous and hilarious version of Poe's macabre classic tale. The production will be performed by the graduating company of actors from VCA Drama and fully produced by students from VCA Production who have created a sumptuous dream-like world of lavish costumes and a grotesque set to illuminate this gripping and gruesome tale.

"In February 2008 I threw down a challenge to the actors to come up with three ideas for their end of year production. To my great surprise, they pitched just one: *The Masque of the Red Death*, adamant Poe's chilling piece was their one and only choice. Following an intense creative workshop in May and our subsequent daily work, the company has devised an astonishing ensemble interpretation of Poe's layered, thrilling tale. I look forward to presenting the premiere of this remarkable work." **John Bolton**

Originally published as a short story, *The Masque of the Red Death* is set inside a secluded abbey where Prince Prospero has taken refuge with a thousand nobles to escape 'The Red Death'. This ghastly disease is ravaging the poor, its victims succumbing in just thirty minutes to a gruesome end - sudden excruciating pain and dizziness followed by severe sweating of blood through the pores. The abbey provides a welcome sanctuary, a place of enjoyment and safety for the nobility, fearful of the pestilence sweeping the land. One night the Prince hosts a sumptuous masked ball for the royal group in seven rooms of the abbey, each a different colour. As midnight approaches, a mysterious figure emerges from the shadows - can the group escape the horror of 'The Red Death'?

Written long ago, the themes and issues explored in *The Masque of the Red Death* are bound to resonate with audiences of today: border security and quarantine controls; the responsibility of rulers and governments to their citizens; death and life. Poe's story explores a plague, both medical and moral and is a metaphor for a country's disease of mind and/or state. No matter how hard a country tries to keep out an enemy, there is always a chance it will still get in.

**Warning: this production contains strong language and graphic visual scenes which may offend and is not for the squeamish**

Edgar Allan Poe first published this story in the May 1842 edition of *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine* as *The Mask of the Red Death*, with the tagline *A Fantasy*. This first publication earned him \$12. A revised version was published in the July 19, 1845, edition of the *Broadway Journal* under the now-standard title *The Masque of the Red Death*. The original title emphasized the figure at the end of the story; its new title put emphasis on the masquerade ball. The story has inspired a number of projects across music, radio, stage and screen. The most well-known of the latter is the 1964 film directed by Roger Corman and starring Vincent Price. The story has also been referred to in many novels including Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* and Stephen King's *The Shining*. A recent theatre production was staged in London at the Batterseas Arts Centre (October 2007-April 2008).

**Season:** Wed 29 October to Fri 7 November at 7.30pm / Sat 1 and Thur 6 November at 3pm & 7.30pm  
No performances Sunday 2 or Monday 3 November  
Food and refreshments are available to purchase.

**Cost:** \$20 / \$12

**Bookings:** [vca-drama@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:vca-drama@unimelb.edu.au)

**Enquiries:** 03 9685 9225

**Venue:** Space 28, VCA Drama, 28 Dodds Street, Southbank

**[www.vca.unimelb.edu.au/drama](http://www.vca.unimelb.edu.au/drama)**

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